

## Book of the Month Club News, March 1972



### Martha Rofheart

BY WILLIAM TARG

EDITORS delight in discovering "first novelists." Martha Jones Rofheart is one. She was born in Louisville, Kentucky, and brought up by her grandparents, who were of Welsh extraction. Her writing career began early; when she was still in the first grade her grand-

father began paying her twenty-five cents for each poem she wrote. As a child, she had several poems printed in local newspapers and magazines, and at the age of 10, she won a national one-act play contest. Her graduation from high school with first honors gave rise to a hope in her family that she would turn out to be a scholar and a writer, or, at the very least, a teacher. But Miss Martha Jones was determined to be an actress.

Offered two university scholarships, she turned them down in favor of a drama school scholarship.

William Targ is editor in chief of G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Martha attended the University of Cincinnati's College of Music and Drama for two years, then came to New York to audition for Lynn Fontanne. Miss Fontanne, choosing Martha over more than a thousand other applicants, promised her a part in the next Lunt and Fontanne play. Miss Fontanne also arranged to coach Martha in an audition for several producers; one of them came through with a job. Says Mrs. Rofheart: "My first professional appearance was at the age of 17 in New Haven, Connecticut. The play was *Blithe Spirit*, and I was general understudy. The appearance was inadvertent; my head showed above a sofa where I was crouched, throwing things about, being a poltergeist. Needless to say, the stage manager found other means of manifesting the supernatural, and I went back to understudy rehearsals."

She left *Blithe Spirit* to join the Lunts in *The Pirate*—this time a bona fide appearance. Other shows she appeared in, either on Broadway or on tour, were *Harriet* (with Helen Hayes), *Dream Girl*, *The Respectful Prostitute*, *Joan of Lorraine*, *Serena Blandish*, *The Heiress* and *The Cocktail Party*. She played in stock companies, both in Canada and in the United States, in a wide variety of (Continued on page 11)

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## MARTHA ROFHEART

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(Continued from page 6) roles, from a teenager in *Kiss and Tell* to one of the old ladies in *Arsenic and Old Lace*. She appeared in two of the most popular American Theatre Wing hospital shows, *Charley's Aunt* and *The Warrior's Husband*.

Although Mrs. Rofheart is an ardent student of Shakespeare—in particular of the chronicle plays—and has belonged to a number of Shakespeare reading groups, her only professional Shakespearean experience was as Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and as Lady Macbeth, this last on television. Among her fondest television memories are of playing Phaedra, Antigone and Electra in a series of CBS programs dealing with Greek drama.

After her marriage and the birth of a son, Martha found that maintaining the delicate balance between motherhood and a career which often took her away from home was not easy. She decided to turn to writing and became an advertising copywriter. She still works, on a part-time basis, for Leland Advertising, of which her husband, Ralph, is vice-president. Their son, Evan, is now 14. They live in Manhattan and have a summer and weekend house in Amagansett, Long Island. She is well into her second novel, which she hopes to complete before the end of this year.

TEXT

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BY WILLIAM TARG

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